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ABSTRACT

The first part of a discussion of curriculum for advanced business Arabic outlines the need for development of such a course, arguing that traditional courses do not meet the vocational needs of the growing audience for Arabic instruction. The second part describes a methodology for a newly designed course that uses problem-solving and guided learning strategies as principal elements and integrates the teaching of communicative, cultural, and linguistic competence. The third part discusses and analyzes a sample unit, certain teaching techniques, and evaluation procedures. The discussion concludes with recommendations and a look at the methodology's advantages for advanced Arabic instruction. (MSE)

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ADVANCED BUSINESS ARABIC:APPLICATION AND IMPLICATIONS

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The purpose of the present paper is fourfold. First, the need for developing an Advanced Business Arabic course is clearly stated. This is followed by a description of the methodology for the newly designed course. The third part includes a discussion and analysis of a sample unit, along with certain teaching techniques and evaluation procedures. The paper concludes with some recommendations and implications.

A. The Need for Advanced Business Arabic

It has become quite evident that there is in this country a considerable increase in and desire for learning Arabic for academic and professional purposes. There are today more than ninety universities and colleges whose foreign language programs include Arabic language study. Several textbooks have been written over the past two decades to teach both literary and colloquial Arabic. However, the only work (that I know of) dealing partly with business Arabic in a commercial fashion is *Access to Arabic* produced by Heinle and Heinle Enterprise, Inc. (1980). With the exception if this work, there is almost nothing written on this subject.

The investigator has been involved in teaching advanced language courses for several years at the University of Michigan during the regular academic year, in the Portland State University Intensive Summer Program, and in the United Arab Emirates University Intensive Arabic Program for Advanced European and American Students of Arabic. Results drawn from analyzing data provided by 159 students who completed a questionnaire about their academic majors and their reasons for studying Arabic indicate that sixty-one percent of the respondents are

Arabic majors and thirty-nine percent have majors in anthropology, business, computer science, economics, journalism, and political science. The respondents cited the following reasons for studying Arabic: job-prospects—in business, industry, government foreign service, and teaching (112); research related to their field of specialization (38); and ethnic background (9).[1]

This new focus on learning Arabic for career objectives poses several challenges that cannot be met by conventional Arabic course offerings. The seriousness of this matter becomes even more evident as we see in recent years a constant growth in the number of graduate students, both at the University of Michigan and at other universities, who are working on combined or double degrees in Arabic and Business, Arabic and Computer Science, etc.

In view of this problem, the investigator sought and obtained funding from the U.S. Office of Education to develop a two-semester Advanced Business Arabic course to respond to the demands of today's students of Arabic as well as members of the business community who also have expressed interest in business Arabic. There is a great need for the addition of this course to the Arabic curriculum. This is especially true with the expansion of Arab investments in the United States and U.S. business and government operations in the Arab world--both of which require promoting functional and productive business language skills in students of Arabic.

Various works published in recent years provide additional support for the inclusion of language-for-business courses in the modern foreign language curriculum (Dandoli, 1986; Dugan, 1981; Grosse, 1980; Henderson, 1981; Hubbard, 1982; Joiner, 1981; Lurie, 1982; Paulsell, 1983; Schaub, 1983; Simon, 1980; Tsongas, 1981). In the eighties, the new trend toward learning foreign languages

for practical and business purposes have led to the development of several courses to teach Business French (Cummins, 1982; Bénouis, 1986; Fairchild, 1986), German (Galt, 1977; Varner, 1979), Italian, Spanish, and less-commonly taught languages such as Chinese, Japanese (Kataoka, 1982; Hijirida, 1986), Portuguese and Russian.

B. Methodology

In the summer of 1979, the investigator coordinated the Summer Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies held at the University of Michigan. In response to the need of 16 students representing five major Arabic programs in the U.S., the investigator offered an experimental eight-week course in Advanced Business Arabic. Because of the unavailablilty of an appropriate textbook, the course was informal in terms of its materials and methods. The investigator together with his teaching assistant were involved in collecting and preparing the course material, utilizing the resources of the University of Michigan Library: Arabic newspapers, journals, economic reports, maps, as well as useful brochures, reports and charts obtained from Arab embassies in the U.S. Although the course was informal and short, it turned out to be a great success.

During recent trips to the Arab world, the investigator was able, with the cooperation of several colleagues in Arab universities, to collect up-to-date authentic materials covering a wide variety of topics. These include such topics as business customs and practices, business correspondence, business negotiations, contracts, invoices, letters of credit, and other topics dealing with banking, finances, import and export, advertising, currency and international economics. These newly

collected materials, together with the materials already prepared and tried during summer 1979,[2] formed the basis for the production of 30 units (totalling approximately 350 pages) to be called *Advanced Business Arabic*.

The goal of this textbook is to develop fluency and ease in understanding and using business Arabic. It is expected that the student who successfully completes this book will be able to 1) understand business reports and commentaries presented in Arabic; 2) read original Arabic materials dealing with business and trade (contracts, correspondences, reports, banking transactions, advertisements, etc.) with a reasonable degree of comprehension; 3) express himself orally by requesting or giving information needed for business transactions; 4) fill out business forms, checks and documents; design advertisements of various types; write business letters, notes and short reports; and 5) interpret specific cultural, religious and social customs and behavior involved in Arab business practices and negotiations. *Advanced Business Arabic* provides amply for students who are adequately prepared and willing to work hard in order to use efficiently and effectively what they have learned.

To accomplish these goals, we have adopted an integrated and balanced methodology that aims at making the learning-teaching process both interesting and challenging. This methodology makes considerable use of problem solving and guided learning strategies intended to assist the students in their efforts to internalize newly learned items and to perform the various learning tasks and activities successfully. While at the same time emphasizing communicative and cultural competence, this balanced methodology does not ignore the importance of linguistic competence—especially since the major goal of advanced Arabic course work in

general is to produce fluency combined with accuracy. This concern is shared by most students of advanced Arabic, who repeatedly express the desire for acquiring both fluency and linguistic accuracy.

For this purpose, the *Student's Guide* (Rammuny, 1980) has become in recent years a required grammar reference to accompany materials used in advanced Arabic language courses, including the most recent Advanced Business Arabic course which is offered by our Department of Near Eastern Studies. The *Student's Guide* contains 1) basic fundamentals for effective Arabic writing, with particular attention given to the ways of linking sentences together and to the system of cohesion and coherence; 2) brief notes to illustrate the basic differences in grammar and idiom between Arabic and English, keyed to the most common errors of American students; and 3) two lists of verb-preposition idioms that cause particular trouble to American students of Arabic. The first list is arranged according to whether or not the verb-preposition idiom is equivalent to its English counterpart, while the second list is arranged alphabetically according to the Arabic preposition in the idiom.

I should point out here that the Advanced Business Arabic course gives more emphasis to communicative and cultural competencies because it presupposes control of basic vocabulary and grammatical structures typically covered by the end of the intermediate level of Arabic at the University of Michigan. Thus, grammatical and stylistic explanations are given only for remedial purposes, after the communicative activities performed by the student are completed.

The Advanced Business Arabic course stresses cultural competence through the immediate use of video cassettes and visual stimuli such as photos, charts, advertisements, banking documents, brochures, and cartoons. These audiovisual materials help in 1) illustrating cultural insights, 2) allowing the students to observe the use of body language and discuss with the instructor certain nonverbal aspects of communication, and 3) inspire the students in their oral and written communication.

This integrative methodology is therefore not limited to a particular single method—for example, audiolingual (Lado, 1964), natural (Krashen and Terrell, 1983), functional (Germain, 1982), or communicative (Brumfit, 1979; Littlewood, 1981). Rather, it is a balanced integrative methodology that incorporates the best techniques of all these modern methods—which, from actual classroom experience, we know to be most successful and effective.

C. Sample Unit

A typical unit taken from the Advanced Business Arabic course consists of the following components or sections:

1. Text. The text usually consists of a business task-oriented topic, such as a visa or application form, a restaurant menu, a business letter, a contract, or a commercial advertisement. The text can also take the form of a dialogue, an economic or business report, or an article—all of which are centered around trade and business. Most texts include or are accompanied by visual or videocassette illustrations.

2. List of useful or troublesome business terminology. Each text is followed by a list of the newly introduced business terms and expressions. In order to aid students in better understanding the text, English and simple Arabic equivalents are provided and the list is arranged according to the occurrence of the items in the text, thus making it easier for students to follow and remember.

3. Cultural Notes. This section contains brief explanations (in Arabic) or further illustrations of commonly used cultural expressions that occur in the text, especially those texts based on audiovisual materials.

4. Communicative Practice Drills. This section consists of two parts. The first part contains a series of structured drills starting with the use of a select group of the newly introduced expressions of the lesson. This is done in the form of a role-playing situation where one student asks a question and another student responds, attending to both form and meaning. Other types of drills in this section involve multiple choice, matching, rearrangement, cloze, etc. These problem-solving types of drills are intended primarily to assist students in their effort to arrive at an interpretation of the meaning of the text with ease. The second part starts with a discussion of the content of the text based on clues to guide the students in their attempt to give responses and express their views freely and critically—for example, comparing Arab business practices and customs with those practiced in the U.S.A. and in the West. This section concludes with an oral assignment based on material similar in content and form to that of the text. Students are required to prepare the assignment for oral free discussion in the classroom. To encourage total free choice and discussion, the instructor requests

individual students once a week to prepare oral reports based on materials of their choice, provided that the topic selected by the student should be comparable to what is studied in class.

Oral free discussion occasionally involves live business reports and commentaries based on recorded audio tapes or videocassettes and sometimes presentations made by guest speakers.

5. Written Assignment. Written activities vary according to the content of each unit. For example, if the unit deals with travel, the written assignment requires students to complete, in Arabic, actual forms needed for travel, such as a visa application, a landing form, or a hotel registration form. Units that introduce students, for example, to the banking system or import/export trade in the Arab world contain written assignments that require students to fill out actual deposit and withdrawal slips and letters of credit. However, for those units which consist of commercial advertisements or correspondence, students are required to create similar written work along the lines of the material presented in class. Also, the written assignment can take the form of summaries and critical reviews in units where the content is based on commercial, economic and business articles.

I should add here that my students are requited to 1) take notes on all listening comprehension activities—including guest speakers, 2) answer questions in Arabic on monthly tests, and 3) write a term paper of 5–7 pages in Arabic on a familiar topic.

1. Teaching Techniques

Now, let me turn to the techniques that are used in handling the various components of each unit.

First, the instructor gives a brief introduction to the text, providing clues designed to assist the student in understanding the meaning of the various parts of the text. This, motivates the students to read the text with enthusiasm. The instructor assigns the text to be read outside the class with the aid of the list of troublesome terms, the cultural notes, and the general questions following the cultural notes. In the classroom, the teacher stimulates student participation by opening discussion of some of the main issues included in the text, engaging the students in giving short oral responses. The teacher serves as a guide, helping the students to organize their answers and correcting wrong answers.

For the next class session, the teacher assigns communicative practice drills including critical discussion of the text and the oral assignment which is based on new material similar to the text. For reinforcement of the most useful and troublesome terminology and cultural expressions, the class starts with role-playing situations where some of the students ask the questions given for each item and others respond. The students then continue oral practice doing the rest of the drills as required under the supervision and guidance of the instructor, who intervenes only when it is felt that students' errors may impede communication.

If time permits, the students start the written assignment in class and then finish it at home, bringing it with them to the next class. The teacher usually marks errors of spelling, grammar, punctuation, as well as usage, style, and diction. This is done with a correction key with which the students are familiar. Stu-

dents are then requested to revise their written assignments carefully, correcting all marked errors, and then return the final version of the composition to the instructor, who checks to make sure they have been properly corrected. After returning the corrected compositions to students, the instructor discusses the most troublesome common errors that occurred in them and refers students to the *Student's Guide* for further explanations. This self-correction technique has been found to be very effective in advanced Arabic classes. To conclude this methodology part, I should mention that the Advanced Business Arabic course is conducted entirely in Arabic.

2. Evaluation

At the University of Michigan, the evaluation of student performance is viewed as a regular part of Arabic language instruction. The primary objectives of the evaluation process are, first, to obtain the necessary information regarding the students' on-going progress in the course and, second, to determine their level of achievement as measured in functional proficiency at the end of the course.

Feedback about the progress of students in the course is obtained through observation of student performance in class and on oral and written reports, or through monthly tests based on the material already covered. The overall achievement of students at the end of the course is evaluated through an integrative proficiency-based test (Rammuny, 1983). This test consists of four sections: listening comprehension, reading comprehension, writing, and an oral interview. The oral and writing sections include items requiring the student to describe or perform certain business-related activities or tasks. During the oral interview, for example,

the student may be asked to describe the activities he/she is expected to perform after landing in an Arab airport, how to get to the hotel, how to open an account in a bank, or to comment on specific cultural practices pertaining to business transactions (Gordon, 1974). Examples of writing tasks include filling out job applications and travel forms, writing and responding to business letters, and designing commercial advertisements and brochures (Larson and Jones, 1985; Liskin-Gasparrow, 1984; Magnon, 1985).

E. Implications and Recommendations

The newly designed Advanced Business Arabic course material will contribute to the Arabic teaching profession in two ways. First, it will enrich and expand the curriculum for Arabic language instruction in U.S. colleges and universities that offer Arabic for non-native speakers by adding a unique, new course for business Arabic. The course presupposes knowledge of elementary and intermediate level Arabic. It is open to students, members of the business community, and government officials who desire to enter jobs in business, industry, or government agencies that deal with the Arab world. The course may also be taken by Arabic majors as part of their Arabic language study, or as an elective by anthropology, business, computer science,economics, engineering, international law and political science majors.

Second, the new *Advanced Business Arabic* textbook will help promote U.S. business and trade competitiveness in the Arab world, and eventually assist in the improvement and expansion of American-Arab economic and business rela-

tions. There are now numerous job opportunities (for graduates who combine their training with business Arabic) in such areas as banking, industry, imports and exports, management corporations, real estate, and private consulting firms.

Finally, the *Advanced Business Arabic* textbook makes a modest contribution to foreign language teaching methodology in general. The investigator's experience in teaching advanced language courses over the past ten years has convinced him that the use of an eclectic, integrative methodology, such as the one described in this paper, is the most effective for optimal language learning. This integrative methodology, which the investigator called for in two of his articles (*Al-ᶜArabiyya*, 1978, 1979), supports and is supported by Hammerly's most recent publication entitled *An Integrated Theory of Language Teaching* (1985).

This methodology has four implications for foreign language learning and teaching. First, it calls for the integration of the three essential components of language (i.e., linguistic, cultural, and communicative) with business terminology and practice, as well as the integration of newly acquired and previously acquired learning. Second, it focuses attention on three basic learning processes; namely, the process of internalizing newly introduced items, the process of interpretation of meaning, and the process of communication. This direct focus on learning processes necessitates the development of certain strategies (of the type described in Part C of this paper) that will help the students in their efforts to internalize and interpret what they learn, and then use it in their oral and written communication. I would like to see more research conducted in the area of learning processes and the strategies needed for successful learning. As pointed out by Crymer (1980), we need "to know more about the nature of these strategies and to find out which ones

are helpful for which learners for which learning factors at which point in their development." Third, it incorporates the three tasks of selection, gradation, and presentation; however, it handles them differently from what is traditionally done. For example, the basis for selection of the Advanced Business Arabic course materials is not the linguistic system of the Arabic language, but it is authentic business-oriented materials that have real meaning and value to the students' particular needs and work experience. Again, gradation of the materials in Advanced Business Arabic is not dictated by the instructor or the textbook writer, as is usually done. Rather, it is chosen through a process of cooperation between the learner and myself (as their teacher), taking into full consideration the learners' abilities and demands more than anything else. I have already talked about the task of presentation and suggested a variety of communicative interchanges and problem-solving drills which attend both to fluency and accuracy; therefore, there is no need for repetition here.

I would like to conclude by pointing out that the challenge today facing the Arabic teaching profession in particular and foreign language profession in general is to focus our attention on the specific needs of the learners as well as on the processes and strategies involved in successful second language acquisition. This means the setting up of clearly defined goals in functional proficiency for each level of instruction, the selection of authentic teaching materials and methods to meet these new learning goals, and finally the construction of proficiency based tests to evaluate the attainment of the specific goals set for each level. This organized systematization of foreign language instruction hopefully will unify our profession to meet the various expectations and needs of our students

NOTES

[1]This is based on a four-year survey (1981–1985) of all students enrolled in the advanced Arabic courses that I taught at the University of Michigan, Portland State University, and the United Arab Emirates University.

[2]These materials were revised and updated before they were included in the course.

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